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GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
LANSING

JOHN D. CHERRY, JR.
LT. GOVERNOR

September 26, 2003

Dear Colleague:

You may have heard me speak or have read about my intention to make Michigan a “magnet” state for jobs, economic opportunity, and people. To achieve that vision – in essence, for Michigan to be the best place in the country to live, work, and raise a family – we must make the State of Michigan, as an organization, a great place to do great work, as well.

I recognize that these are challenging times in which to talk about creating a great workplace. The nation’s stagnant economy continues to choke Michigan’s potential for economic growth, and we in state government feel the pinch, keenly. Those of you on the “front lines” of serving our citizens probably feel that pinch more than anyone else in state government.

In the face of such challenges – in fact, especially because of them – I am convinced that now is *precisely* the right time to talk about making our organization stronger. In the face of difficulty, we could throw in the towel and say, “it’s too hard to talk about doing better work for our citizens or about how we make our workplace more satisfying;” or we can embrace the opportunity to excel in the face of adversity. I choose the latter.

Great organizations invest in engaging their employees in discussions about how to make their workplaces great. And we in the State of Michigan should be no different. To make Michigan a tremendous state in which to live and a tremendous organization in which to work, I believe we must create a culture, a way of doing things around here that is based on shared values, values we hold deeply, and values we *hold* ourselves to.

And that work must involve all of us. We can’t have shared values if I *tell* you what they are; send you an email that says, “Here’s your values.” You have to have a chance to hear them, to hear how we selected them, to sift through them, to think about how they relate to your personal values, to talk about how well you are already living these in your shop, and to invite you to see how we can become one really great, proud, focused culture, supporting each other in our values and our work.

As you all know, we have embarked on a state-wide program through which every employee can help articulate the shared values on which we will “hang our hats” and build the reputation of this state. I have been inundated with positive responses to this effort and want to take a few moments to update you on our progress.

DETERMINING OUR CORE VALUES

Let me briefly summarize how we arrived at our values:

When I first told the people of Michigan that I wanted this job, I consistently shared five values: excellence, integrity, inclusion, creativity, and engagement. In January, I pulled my cabinet together and asked them what they felt had to be the values we would share and hold ourselves to. They decided on three: Excellence, Integrity, and Inclusion. I asked you through an email survey to tell me four things:

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1. How important are these 3 values?
2. How well are we achieving these values?
3. What behaviors do you think are important to truly demonstrate these values?
4. What additional value do you think is vital to have a “great place to work?”

More than 12,000 of you responded:

1. You said Excellence, Integrity and Inclusion are extremely important in the creation of a great workplace.
2. You said you widely believe that the values are not nearly as evident in practice as you believe they should be.
3. You offered over 38,000 specific behaviors that you think we need to engage in if we are serious about our core values. (Teams working within your departments went through every response and shared a list of what they heard. It was powerful and gratifying feedback, and I’ve attached the list they shared at the end of this letter – it’s that input that is serving as the basis of the vision and values discussions you are having within your departments right now.)
4. You said an additional value is critical to a great workplace: teamwork.

The Fourth Value: Teamwork

You said that teamwork both makes for a great place to work – one of fun and shared pride –and it is also important for the kind of creative work – like our Children’s Action Network – that demands that we reach out broadly to others. I agree.

Now, the important next steps begin.

Let me leave you with a **promise** and a **challenge**. I promise you that this is no fad, no flavor-of-the-month. Not a flash in the pan, but just a beginning. We are going to keep talking, learning, and **acting** around our values. Our supervisors, managers, and leaders will be developed around these values and held accountable for them. I have done the values work you will do in team meetings across the state, and so have the members of my Executive Office staff and the Cabinet. I will expect no less commitment from my leaders to this vital process.

My **challenge**, and my hope, is that you accept this invitation to empower yourself to become the change you want to see in this workplace. I mean it when I say that our state employees are the heart of this excellent organization, and I mean it when I say that you are the key to its strong future. These will not be easy days for us; we are all working in the rain. But working together, we will weather this storm.

Sincerely and gratefully,



Jennifer M. Granholm
Governor

Value Feedback Gathered from State Employees

You said:

- You take pride in your work and feel a strong kinship to your own team, more than just “state employees.”
- You feel a strong sense of responsibility to clients/customers/constituents. You speak passionately about “serving the customer” and “helping our clients.”
- You have serious concerns centered on being short-staffed and high volume workloads. Budget woes, impacts on state employees, and lay-offs weigh heavily on your mind.
- You want to help make things better and support our work on vision and values but are concerned about lack of follow through, that this may be another fad of the month.
- Many of you voiced general feelings of being under appreciated and not recognized within your agencies.
- You appreciate that we all are trying to govern with respect and civility to each other regardless of partisan political differences.
- You recognize that it will take time to make things better, but you also want the Governor to know that state employees have felt “oppressed” in the past and may not be willing to buy in easily.